

**OPTIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FORM**

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT NUMBER: OR-035-04-02**

**BLM Office: Baker Resource Area**

**Lease/Serial/Case File No. OR 59650**

**Proposed Action Title/Type:** Gem Mine Road Relocation

**Location of Proposed Action:** WM, T. 8S., R. 44E., section 16, lot 11. See maps attached.

**Applicant (if any):** Baker County Road Department

**Conformance With Applicable Land Use Plan:**

This proposed action is subject to the following land use plan.

**Name of Plan:** Baker Resource Management Plan **Date Approved:** 7/12/89

This plan has been reviewed to determine if the proposed action conforms with the land use plan terms and conditions as required by 43 CFR 1610.5.

**Remarks:** The site is located within the Baker County Geographical Unit. Public lands are to be available for utility corridors and local rights-of-way. Baker County has zoned the area Primary Forest, which means the area is managed by a federal agency and the county assumes no jurisdiction. If the land was private, it would be zoned Timber Grazing or Mineral Extraction. Roads are an outright permitted use in these zones.

**Need for Proposed Action:** The purpose is to relocate a portion of Gem Mine Road, a primitive county road, to move it away from a private residence. The road currently runs within a few feet of the front of this house. The occupant has asked the county to relocate the road further away, and the county has agreed to do so.

**General Setting:** The site is about 25 miles east/northeast of Baker City and ½ mile west of Sparta. At present, the Gem Mine Road leaves the Sparta Road at the point where the latter crosses the gentle divide between Sawmill Creek and Town Gulch. It runs south for about 300 feet across private land, past the house, and then enters BLM land.

The relocated route would leave the Sparta Road approximately 300 feet east of its present location. It would run south along the fence line at the east edge of the subject private property, crossing the head of Town Gulch, and enter the BLM land at its northeast corner. It would then bear to the right and ascend a gentle slope for about 600 feet to rejoin the existing road.

See maps attached.

**Description of Proposed Action:** The proposed action is to grant a right-of-way for the construction, use and maintenance of a single-lane county road. The road would have a 13-foot driving surface and a total profile width of 19 feet, which includes 3-foot wide, one-foot deep drainage ditches on each side, where needed. The road would have a 12-inch aggregate base and a 4-inch crowned granite sand surface. See the cross sectional diagram attached. Some fill material would probably be placed where the route crosses through the site of an old, small pond site at the northeast corner of the subject BLM land. A 12-inch culvert pipe would be placed at this location, in case the adjoining area collects water and feeds it into the pond site.

Equipment used to build the road would be a D7 dozer, grader, and 10-yard dump trucks. A trackhoe would be used for grubbing and a roller for compacting. A water truck would be available as needed for dust abatement. It is expected that the project would take two – three days to complete.

The route would be pioneered by the dozer, with use of the trackhoe for grubbing as needed. The base and surface material, as well as any fill material needed, would be brought in by dump truck. The material would be spread, shaped and crowned as necessary by the dozer and/or grader and compacted by the roller. The drainage ditches would be constructed and shaped by the grader before material is brought in.

The ditches and other disturbed areas not covered by surface material would be seeded to a mixture specified by BLM. The existing road segment to be abandoned would be reclaimed by pulling material back over it and restoring the contour as much as feasible, then constructing waterbars and seeding.

**Alternatives:** The only alternative considered is No Action, which would require that the existing road continue to be used. Another alternative not given further consideration is for the route of the new segment to more closely follow the route of a side road off the county road. This alternative (as well as No Action) would not accomplish the stated objective of moving the road an acceptable distance from the private residence.

#### Environmental Impacts:

Critical Element	Affected		Critical Element	Affected	
	Yes	No		Yes	No
Air Quality	X		T & E Plants		X
ACECs		X	Tribal Concerns & Treaty Rights		X
Cultural Resources	X		Wastes, Hazardous/Solid		X
Environmental Justice		X	Water Quality, Drinking/Ground		X
Farmlands, Prime/Unique		X	Wetlands/Riparian Zones		X
Floodplains		X	Wild & Scenic Rivers		X
T & E Animals		X	Wilderness		X
T & E Fish		X			

**Description of Impacts:** Air Quality: Dust would be raised during the road construction activities, which in turn would have an effect on air quality. Use of the water truck would abate this to a large extent. Any effects therefore would be minimal and would also be localized and temporary (two – three days). Once the project is completed, it would quickly clear up.

Cultural Resources: The proposed project would impact two historic features. One is a ditch crossing the northeast portion of the subject BLM parcel. This ditch is believed to be part of the 1871 Sparta Ditch system and is considered potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. It was probably originally used for mining and perhaps later for irrigation. It apparently has not been used since the 1920s.

The proposed route crosses the ditch at a previously disturbed location where old single track roads intersect. Thus, the impact would be diminished; however, the project could still disturb up to an additional 25 feet of intact ditch.

The second feature is the small dam and impoundment area, previously mentioned, at the extreme northeast corner of the BLM parcel. The proposed action would alter or destroy part of this feature. It is considered Not Eligible for the National Register.

A Cultural Resources Survey Report is located in the case file.

Vegetation: Vegetation is ponderosa pine forest with an understory of various grasses, forbs, and shrubs. Species include bluebunch wheatgrass, Idaho fescue, a bluegrass species, elk sedge, snowberry, lupine, strawberry, and Oregon grape.

Vegetation in the profile of the road (about ¼ acre) would be destroyed during the construction activities. This would be partially replaced by reseeding the abandoned road segment.

Soils: The map unit at the site is Tolo-Dogtown complex, according to the Soil Survey of Baker County Area, Oregon. This unit consists primarily of Tolo silt loam and Dogtown gravelly loam soils. These soils both are deep and well drained, with a moderate to high water erosion hazard. The soils are subject to rutting and compaction when moist.

The soil in the profile of the road would be disturbed and compacted, along with some minor dislocation. The soil would be briefly exposed to the hazard of water erosion with the removal of vegetation. After the construction, the underlying soil would be protected by the aggregate road base. There would also be disturbance during rehabilitation of the road segment to be abandoned; thereafter, the soil in this profile would be protected by the waterbars and seeding measures and the minor erosion occurring there now would be eliminated.

Wildlife: The area is mule deer and elk range, and provides habitat for blue and ruffed grouse. A variety of other birds and mammals could also be expected. There could be a temporary frightening away of some species during construction by the noise and general commotion. There would be a negligible (¼ acre) loss of habitat.

Range Resources: Most of the route is located within Rosebud Mine Grazing Allotment #02068. A small segment at the north end is located outside of the above allotment on what is apparently unallotted federal range. There would be a loss of about ¼ acre of livestock forage, partially replaced by reseeding the abandoned segment. This is not enough to warrant a change in the grazing permit.

Constructing the project would require a small segment of the grazing allotment boundary fence to be taken down temporarily, and a gate to be relocated. The permittee has indicated he intends to rebuild the fence and move it to the property line (and thus enclose the unallotted land into the Rosebud Mine Allotment).

Weeds: The project is expected to have no more than a negligible effect on the spread or control of noxious weeds. Removal of the native vegetation could expose the site to the threat of weed invasion, however, after construction is completed, the road surface would probably not support vegetative growth. Seeding the drainage ditches and the abandoned segment would retard weed invasion on those areas.

Timber Resources: The site is located in a timbered area. Some small trees would need to be removed. The applicant intends to avoid merchantable trees if possible, but one or two may have to be taken.

Recreation: Some casual sightseeing and hunting probably occurs on the affected BLM land. These opportunities may be increased slightly by the improved perceived access to the BLM land (see Access below).

Visual Resources: The project area is rated Class III visual quality. In this class, activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer.

During construction, the activity would attract the attention for a few seconds of travelers on the Sparta Road as they drive by. After construction, the road would be visible for a few seconds to travelers, but would probably not attract attention. There are a number of other side roads leaving the Sparta Road in this area. The new road would be visible for a short distance from the Sparta Road, then disappear into the woods.

Minerals: The area is mineralized, but a search of the records revealed no active claims in the area.

Other Land Uses, Rights, Facilities: A right-of-way for a domestic water pipeline, held by the owner/occupant of the aforementioned house, runs for about 480 feet from the house up the existing Gem Mine Road. The proposed road would cross this right-of-way as it joins the existing road. The pipeline is believed to be buried deep enough so that it would not be disturbed by the proposed construction. Abandoning the segment of existing road would reduce the possibility for disturbance to this pipeline.

Access: Physical and legal access to the area is provided by the existing Gem Mine Road. The presence of the new road would likely improve the perception of, if not actual, access to public land. Presently, it may appear at a casual glance from the Sparta Road that the existing road ends at the house, or that the resident controls the use of the road. It doesn't look like a county road. The new road would make it obvious that access to this parcel of BLM can be made on a county road.

Socio-Economic: The most obvious benefit would be to the occupant of the house by having traffic routed further away.

**Cumulative Impacts:** Cumulative impacts would result primarily from the short (approximately 300 feet) segment of new road that would also be constructed across the private land lying between the Sparta Road and BLM land. These impacts would be similar to those described above and added incrementally to those impacts. Additionally, this segment of road would cross the head of Town Gulch, an ephemeral channel, a tributary of Eagle Creek. A culvert pipe would be placed at the crossing and some fill material would be bought in. This work would create the potential for sediment production in the Gulch and possible downstream effects on water quality and fishery habitat. However, Town Gulch is only a snowmelt channel at this location and is within about 300 feet of the watershed summit. Therefore, it is expected that any production of sediment would be minimal and below the maximum allowed by DEQ (10 NTUs over Base, a measurement of turbidity), resulting in only negligible downstream effects. Also, there are no listed fish species in Eagle Creek below the mouth of Town Gulch and so no listed fish species would be affected in any case.

**Impacts of No Action Alternative:** Under this alternative, the new road segment would not be constructed. The existing situation would continue and the above impacts would not occur. Traffic would still travel right past the front door of the house. The location and appearance of this road may discourage some from driving it to gain access to the public land. There would continue to be some minor soil erosion occurring on the segment of road that would otherwise be abandoned and rehabilitated. Minor effects from stock grazing and travel on the existing road would continue.

**Description of Mitigation Measures and Residual Impacts:** The following measures should be applied to reduce or eliminate some of the anticipated impacts:

- Provide additional documentation of the historic ditch as recommended in the Cultural Resources Survey Report (pending SHPO concurrence).
- Provide dust control as needed.
- Any fill material brought in must be weed-free.
- Place adequate fill (at least one foot) over the culvert pipe to be installed.
- Consult with the grazing permittee regarding the repair of fences.
- Avoid merchantable trees if possible.
- Seed the drainage ditches and other disturbed areas to a seed mixture specified by BLM.
- Reclaim the abandoned road segment by pulling bermed material over it, constructing waterbars, and seeding.

Residual effects would be as follows:

- Alteration or destruction of up to 25 feet of the historic ditch, and a portion of the small dam/impoundment area. Information about the ditch would be preserved by the documentation.
- Minor, short-term, localized effect on air quality.
- Destruction of about ¼ acre of vegetation, replaced in part by reclaiming and seeding the abandoned road segment.
- Potential for temporary soil erosion. Reduced erosion on the reclaimed segment.
- Negligible loss of wildlife habitat.
- Negligible loss of livestock forage, replaced in part by reclaiming and seeding the abandoned road segment.
- Possible loss of one or two merchantable trees.
- Minimal visual impact.
- Reduced potential for damage to water pipeline.
- Possible improved access to public land.

#### **Persons/Agencies Consulted:**

A letter was sent to a nearby landowner and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, advising them of the project and inviting comment.

A Cultural Resources Survey Report was prepared and submitted to the Oregon State Historic Preservation Officer.

Preparer(s): s/Steve Davidson, Realty Specialist

Environmental Coordinator: s/Ted Davis, Acting Baker Field Manager

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